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October 6, 1969

MEMORANDUM FOR ASSISTANT SECRETARY NEWSOM,  
Department of State - AF

FROM: Roger Morris /s/ RM

SUBJECT: Peace Negotiations -- the Need for Precision

With Bill Brubeck's conversation with Houphouet, we can begin to see at least the murky outline of a new diplomatic episode in the Nigerian civil war. It is not clear yet whether we have been kept in the dark through inadvertence or conscious design. But I feel strongly that we should move right away to try to establish some vital precision in the initiative, largely to protect ourselves from precisely the kind of ambivalence that overtook our policy on the daylight flight agreement. In short, we have an interest in correcting the sloppiness which could lead again to a situation in which the US (and the Biafrans), on a close study of the equities, would not be able to endorse an apparently forthcoming position taken by Gowon. Specifically:

1. Because the Red Cross did some fast shuffling on major provisions of the daylight flight agreement (and because no-one caught them up in the process), we were faced with an agreement for which Gowon expended valuable capital in his own government, yet to which the Biafrans could still pose legitimate objections. The result is that we have neither daylight flights nor a clear field to fix the blame. If someone had ferreted out, and then thought through, the important discrepancies -- the question of inviolability, the air route, the right of call-down, etc. -- we would have saved both lives and energy. As it is now, the Feds are locked in, and we're going to have to make a major push with both sides before we can honestly say that we did our best. Thus my statement, the Canadian initiative, black boxes, etc.

2. I see exactly the same problem developing with the new OAU initiative. So far, the components of that action appear as follows:

- Cease fire: An appeal from HIM to Gowon to offer unilaterally a cease-fire for a temporary period in order to get talks started. Apparently, Gowon would

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do this on the understanding that (a) it would entail a legitimate stand-down in arms supply as well as ground fighting and (b) the Feds would have the right to police the cessation of arms flights into Biafra.

- No pre-conditions: According to Houphouet (HIM didn't mention this point), Gowon is also to offer talks without pre-conditions, which would be a major concession following the obvious battle he has been having with his hawks at Addis and afterward.
- The OAU role: Tanzanians and Ivorians are involved. But the initiative is also clearly stamped with the OAU in the presence of Diallo Telli. No-one seems to be looking ahead at the precise questions of (a) auspices for these talks, (b) third parties, if any, at the table or otherwise, and (c) matters of agenda, context, relationship to OAU Resolution, etc.

3. On this basis, it may well be that Gowon could get his people to make the offer, calculating that it would be just as shrewd and politically profitable (albeit unproductive) as the daylight flight agreement. But Ojukwu will have an easy escape -- and we will be mired in our usual dilemma -- unless someone beforehand answers the following questions:

- Does the arms stand-down also apply to the FMG? If so, who polices them?
- How does the FMG police the skies while Ojukwu is given safe passage out to the talks?
- Who verifies the cease-fire, and how?
- If Nigerian unity is not a pre-condition, does this mean the negotiations are not under the latest OAU resolution?
- If this is under OAU auspices, is it a warm-over of the Concom, or something new? Is the OAU prepared to change the Concom, if necessary, to include friends of Biafra?

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- What if Addis or Monrovia are unacceptable to Biafra?
- Is Biafra being given a chance to react before a Fed pronouncement?
- Are all strings of negotiation being coordinated by someone?
- What role are the British and French playing?
- Does this have any relationship to relief? (Houphouet foresees "month"; a lot of kids are going to die during the "preliminaries")

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We have certainly learned two lessons by now: (1) Africans generally are slipshod in their peace initiatives, however well-intentioned, and (2) the Biafrans are not; on the contrary, they probe the scenario with great care. Knowing, as we do so well, Ojukwu's standard objections to the OAU, a unilateral concession on arms supply, etc., we can readily expect a hard (and justifiable) Biafran rejection of the plot as we now know it.

To be sure, we may discover these bases are covered as we find out more about the action. (I very much doubt it.) But if they aren't, anyone who really wants the action to work (not to mention keeping the US unscathed) should flush out the answers.

I am persuaded, as you know, that there is no virtue (only some pain) in letting these things "take their course". The comfort of non-involvement is illusive when our absence may only mean the war drags on.

cc -~~Am.~~ Clyde Ferguson  
- Mr. Claus Ruser